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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION WRAP-UP

REF: A: PODGORICA 75; B: PODGORICA 71

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On April 2, Montenegro's State Election Commission (SEC) rejected appeals to hold repeat votes at several polling stations. While parties may still take their cases to the Constitutional Court, the SEC decision likely finalizes the results of the election. The vote, which the OSCE assessed as meeting "almost all" international standards, affirmed Montenegro's multi-ethnic character and Euro-Atlantic course. However, the continued and now almost total domination of the ruling coalition over all branches of government could weaken democratic checks and balances. END SUMMARY.

SEC Rejects Appeals~

12. (U) On April 2, the State Election Commission turned down appeals for repeat votes at the handful of polling stations which had experienced what the SEC termed "minor irregularities" on election day. Parties/coalitions still have three days to appeal to the Constitutional Court, but the SEC decision likely finalizes the election results.

~Likely Dooming NS-DSS Chances

13. (SBU) The only significant consequence of the SEC decision is that the pro-Serb People's Party - Democratic Serbian Party (NS-DSS) coalition, which parallel vote counts put squarely at the three percent parliamentary threshold, will fall about 450 votes short of entering Parliament. The NS-DSS, which had pinned its hopes on repeat votes at two polling stations in heavily Serb Herceg Novi municipality, vowed to appeal to the Constitutional Court.

"Final" Tallies

14. (U) Barring the unlikely event of a Court decision in favor of the NS-DSS, the composition of the new 81-member Parliament

will be as follows:

--"European Montenegro" coalition:	48 seats
--Socialist People's Party (SNP):	16
--New Serbian Democracy (NOVA):	8
--Movement for Change (PzP):	5
--Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA):	1
--FORCA:	1
--Democratic Alliance/Albanian Alternative:	1
--Albanian Coalition "Perspective":	1

¶5. (U) The last four parties/coalitions are Albanian parties. While five MPs are elected from specially designated Albanian-majority polling stations, the ruling coalition won the fifth Albanian seat, resulting in the loss of one Albanian seat from the current Parliament.

OSCE: Election Day Kudos, Some Campaign Concerns

¶6. (U) The OSCE/ODIHR mission, together with the OSCE PA and PACE, assessed the election as having "met almost all

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international commitments and standards." In particular, the observers gave Montenegro's election administration and vote itself high marks. However, the OSCE/ODIHR, noting that the campaign had witnessed the blurring of state and party structures, allegations of electoral fraud, and TV news bias, also said that the campaign "again underscored the need for further democratic development." The OSCE/ODIHR's final report is expected out in mid-May.

The Positive...

¶7. (SBU) As touched on in Ref A, the election produced several positive developments. These included:

--Affirmation of Independence: The campaign was noteworthy for the absence of emotional challenges to Montenegrin statehood. Less than three years after the highly contentious independence referendum, this question appears to have been settled.

--Democratic Progress: The calm nature of the campaign and the solid marks for election day proceedings represent another step forward in Montenegro's democratic maturation, despite some concerns about the conduct of the campaign.

--A Vote for Stability: Montenegrins gave the GoM a vote of confidence as Montenegro enters troubled economic waters, with the global financial storm expected to pound the country more severely in the coming months.

--Continued Euro-Atlantic Integration: The GoM has a solid parliamentary majority to support accelerated integration with the EU and NATO. Additionally, all parliamentary parties strongly support EU membership. Although support for NATO lags significantly behind, many of the loudest anti-NATO voices in the current Parliament were not reelected.

--Multi-Ethnicity Over Nationalism: Multi-ethnic, civic parties and coalitions did well, while parties and coalitions based around nationalists principles lagged (with the exception of the small Albanian parties). The multi-ethnic ruling coalition and the SNP - while still primarily Serb, now an avowedly civic party - made strong gains. The decline of the PzP was due to internal schisms, not to the party's civic orientation.

--Decline of Serb Radicals: Related to above point, the overall number of representatives of pro-Serb parties fell from 15 to eight, and the Serb Radical Party and its allies fell out of Parliament altogether. In addition, the new Parliament's only Serb party, NOVA, has promised to pursue a more moderate line. The issue of Kosovo independence did not feature prominently in the pre-election campaign.

--More Constructive Opposition: The trend towards moderation, along with the poor showing of the virulently anti-Djukanovic PzP, bodes well for possible cooperation between the ruling coalition and opposition on some key issues, particularly European integration. The ruling coalition still needs the opposition since certain decisions and legislation require a two-thirds majority (54 out of 81 MPs) vote.

... And Not So Positive

18. (SBU) However, on the negative side of the election ledger:

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--Weak Opposition, Weaker Democracy?: The coalition victory means that the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), the senior coalition partner, will have been in power continuously for almost a quarter of a century by the time the next parliamentary elections are held in 2013. While the DPS kept the country out of the Yugoslav conflicts, forged a multi-ethnic, independent state, and is aggressively integrating Montenegro into the Euro-Atlantic community, the dominance of one political party for so long raises concerns about the transparency and openness of government.

-- The DPS-led Parliament is unlikely to check the DPS-controlled Government, and the fragmented and weak opposition will be hard-pressed to break the current chummy relationship between government officials and leading businesses. In the short term at least, pressure to strengthen

the rule of law, an Achilles heel for Montenegro, will need to come from within the coalition and from a hitherto placid population, as well as from the international community.

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